

## PEER SUPPORT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

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The Centre for the Cooperation in the Mediterranean, in collaboration with the PS Centre, organized a one-day training on Peer Support and Psychological First Aid (PFA) for Youth Red Cross and Red Crescent leaders from 17 Mediterranean National Societies. The training, designed for youth who are 18 and above or young adults, was included in the agenda of the Mediterranean Youth Camp “Atlantis” and provided a platform for exchanging ideas, sharing experiences, and exploring best practices while fostering regional solidarity and collaboration. The workshop aimed to enhance participants’ skills in providing PFA and peer support, underscoring their transformative impact on leadership, empathy, and strategic planning. Through tailored activities and discussions, participants explored how PFA and peer support equip them to better understand and respond to crises while strengthening connections to themselves and their communities.

The training focused on the principles of PFA—Look, Listen, and Link—adapted to the unique needs and experiences of young people. This approach allowed participants to practice compassionate responses to individuals in distress, building their capacity for community resilience and personal growth. The session highlighted empathy, communication, and solidarity as core elements in empowering young leaders to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

A key component of the training was the emphasis on participatory approaches, particularly peer-to-peer engagement. By encouraging active involvement and input from the young leaders, the program shifted from a traditional top-down approach to a more inclusive, bottom-up model. This participatory method allowed participants to shape discussions, share diverse perspectives, and co-create tailored solutions. Such an approach enhances learning, empowers youth, fosters a sense of ownership, builds confidence, and strengthens their commitment to applying their skills within their communities.

Promoting peer support for youth is vital as it builds networks of trust, empathy, and mutual care, particularly when addressing critical mental health and protection concerns such as substance use, suicide, violence, abuse, and exploitation. Peer support fosters a culture where youth can openly share struggles, offer emotional support, practice self-care, and recognize when to seek external help. This collaborative environment develops skills in identifying distress, knowing when and how to seek support, and promoting resilience and compassionate responses to challenges.

Further developing this participatory perspective is essential for building peaceful environments and fostering connections that empower youth to be agents of change in their communities. Engaging youth through peer support and participatory training allows them to embody and promote the seven fundamental principles of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement - Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity, and Universality. This approach transforms youth leaders into catalysts for positive change, inspiring others and nurturing inclusive, resilient, and compassionate communities rooted in Red Cross Red Crescent values.

## CURRICULUM

Time	Topic	Details
7:30-8:30		Breakfast
19:00-10:30	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Getting to know each other,</li> <li>- what are we expecting,</li> <li>- some few rules,</li> <li>- Buddy system, and</li> <li>- what is PFA and why is it important</li> </ul>	<p>The overall aims of the training are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Foster a Safe, Fun, and Inclusive Environment:</b> Emphasize that people learn best in a setting where they feel secure and included. Recognize that many young people today face mental health challenges and are impacted by the uncertainty of our times. Psychological First Aid (PFA) can offer tools to help navigate and adapt to these changing environments.</li> <li>- <b>Encourage Experiential and Participatory Learning:</b> Design the training to be interactive and hands-on, promoting active reflection and engagement. This approach supports deeper learning and personal connection to the material.</li> <li>- <b>Introduce Buddy Systems, Peer Support, and PFA Principles:</b> Highlight the importance of peer support networks and introduce the concepts of buddy systems and PFA, equipping participants with skills to support each other and those around them effectively.</li> </ul>
10:30-11:00		Break
11:00-13:00	<p><b>A critical event or a critical incident:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer pressure to experiment with drugs</li> <li>- Pressure from adults, for example, to contribute financially to the household</li> <li>- Gender-based violence (such as sexual harassment)</li> <li>- Discrimination, for example, based on gender or sexual orientation</li> <li>- Child, early or forced marriage</li> <li>- Early pregnancies</li> <li>- Intimate partner violence or relationship violence</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mapping Exercise on Protective and Risk Factors</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Group Setup:</b> Divide participants into groups of 4-5, ideally grouping people from the same context to facilitate relevant discussions.</li> <li><b>2. Instructions:</b> Each group will brainstorm and list the protective and risk factors faced by youth in their specific context.</li> <li><b>3. Use Guidance:</b> Provide a list of possible incidents (e.g., natural disasters, family separation, community violence) to help them identify relevant factors.</li> <li><b>4. Discuss Reactions:</b> Encourage participants to think about and discuss typical reactions of young people to these factors, focusing on how they might express or cope with these experiences.</li> </ol>

Time	Topic	Details
11:00-13:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Online safety issues, such as bullying, discrimination and harassment</li> <li>- HIV or other common diseases that interfere with health and relationships</li> </ul> <p><b>Main reactions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If risk of harm to himself/herself and/or others</li> <li>- If suicidal thoughts</li> <li>- If extreme, persistent withdrawal i.e. no emotional response,</li> <li>- If persistently whining/whimpering/uncontrolled crying over time (different from a grieving, liberating sob).</li> <li>- If the peer is dissociating i.e. if the peer is detached from surroundings and fails to engage emotionally like the child used to do.</li> <li>- If experiencing hallucinations i.e. hearing voices that are not real (auditory hallucinations) or seeing things/people that are not real (visual hallucinations) in ways that do not seem playful or joking.</li> <li>- If experiencing persistent anxiety attacks</li> <li>- If signs of mental disability such as permanent difficulties understanding language and social interaction</li> </ul> <p>Main reactions to an event depend on many factors, personal history, age, gender, support system, if we had many traumatic events or not</p> <p>Conclude with stress vs distress.</p>	<p><b>Fun Activity – “Pass the Ball” Emotion Game</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Explain the Game:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduce a fun, interactive activity to encourage participants to explore and express emotions.</li> <li>- Say, “I will pass the ball randomly to one of you. Your task is to say, ‘Show me how you look, or behave, when you feel...’ and add any feeling you like, such as happy, sad, angry, surprised, scared, or tired.”</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>2. Instructions for Participants:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When a participant catches the ball, they should act out the assigned emotion with their whole body.</li> <li>- Afterward, they pass the ball to someone else who hasn’t yet had a turn, repeating, “Show me how you look (or behave) when you feel...” and assigning a new emotion.</li> <li>- Note: It’s fine to repeat emotions, as this activity highlights how individuals express the same feelings differently.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>3. Purpose:</b> Emphasize that this exercise shows diversity in emotional expression and helps participants connect with various feelings in a supportive and inclusive way.</li> </ol> <p><b>Group Discussion – Stress as a Reaction</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Question:</b> Ask participants, “Do you think that stress is a good reaction or not?”</li> <li><b>2. Guide Reflection:</b> Facilitate a brief discussion on stress as a natural response, distinguishing between helpful, motivating stress and harmful, prolonged stress. This can set the stage for recognizing healthy coping mechanisms and when to seek support.</li> </ol>

13:00-14:30	Lunch
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Time	Topic	Details
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Please divide participants into 4 groups, with each group completing the following steps:

**1. Develop a Role-Play Scenario**

Each group will create a unique scenario for role play, ensuring it includes:

- 3 Characters: Choose either one child and two adults or three young adults.
- 1 RC Volunteer: Include a Red Cross volunteer as a character.
- Setting: Define the location where the scenario takes place (e.g., a shelter, community centre).
- Incident: Describe a specific incident in detail, such as a family separation during a disaster or another relevant event.
- Possible Solutions: Suggest potential solutions, including relevant resources or support that the RC volunteer might provide.

Each group will develop one scenario, resulting in a total of 4 unique scenarios.

**Support systems**

14:30-16:00

**Activity two:** active listening (what is it?) – do role play

**2. Act Out Scenarios from Other Groups**

- Each group will take turns reading and acting out the scenarios created by the other groups.
- Each group will play out a total of 3 scenarios developed by others, rotating through the scenarios to experience different perspectives.

**3. Group Discussion on Role-Play Challenges**

- After each role play, bring all participants together to discuss the challenges encountered.
- Focus on the difficulties faced by both volunteers and affected individuals within the scenarios, and share any insights gained.

**4. Participate in a PFA Simulation Exercise**

- The main facilitator will lead a final PFA simulation exercise, with participants choosing one of the key scenarios created earlier to play out as a group.
- This simulation allows participants to practice applying PFA techniques in a structured and supportive environment, with guidance from the facilitator.

Time	Topic	Details
16:00-16:30		Break

### 1. When to Reach Out for More Support

**Discussion:** Ask participants, “What situations might make you feel you need additional support?” Encourage them to think of situations where they feel overwhelmed, encounter complex issues, or are uncertain of the right approach.

**Guidance:**

- Highlight key indicators of when to seek support, such as:
  - **Safety Risks:** If someone is at risk of harm to themselves or others.
  - **Complex Needs:** If a case requires skills or knowledge beyond their current capacity.
  - **Personal Well-being:** If they feel emotionally drained or their own well-being is at risk.

**Activity:** In pairs, have participants share a hypothetical scenario where they might need extra support and discuss whom they would turn to for help (e.g., a supervisor, mental health professional).

### 2. Confidentiality and When to Break It

**Explanation:**

- Define confidentiality and its importance in building trust.
- Explain situations where confidentiality may need to be broken, emphasizing:
  - **Risk of Harm:** If someone expresses intent to harm themselves or others.
  - **Child Safety:** If there is any indication of abuse or neglect involving minors.
  - **Legal Obligations:** Situations where there are specific legal requirements to report (which can vary by region).

**Group Activity:** Present a few short scenarios (e.g., a client hints at self-harm, a child shows signs of abuse) and ask participants to discuss in small groups whether confidentiality should be maintained or broken, and why.

### 3. Self-Care Exercise

**Introduction:** Explain the importance of self-care, especially when working in high-stress, emotionally demanding roles. Share that self-care helps prevent burnout and promotes resilience.

**Link:**

- When to reach out for more support?
- confidentiality when to be break it and why?
- Self-care excursive:

16:30-18:30

Time	Topic	Details
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**Exercise:**

- Guide participants through a brief self-care activity, such as *deep breathing* or *grounding exercises*.
- **Example:** Box Breathing Technique:
  - Inhale slowly for 4 seconds, hold the breath for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, hold again for 4 seconds, and repeat.
  - Encourage them to note how they feel before and after the exercise.
- **Debrief:** Ask a few volunteers to share how the exercise felt and how they might incorporate it into their routine.